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ABSTRACT

When autonomous adults are faced with challenging tasks within a nonstressful, collegial environment, they may have an optimal opportunity to learn. This paper asserts that educators should therefore consider strategies for infusing games with academic concepts. Guidelines are offered for conducting three games to stimulate thinking, active learning, and collegial sharing for school-leadership candidates: (1) a planning-simulation game; (2) critical-thinking question cubes; and (3) a leadership perspective multiple-intelligence game (Williams 1995). The latter game is designed to develop seven kinds of intelligence--linguistic, human relations, visual, musical, logical/mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, and interpersonal. One figure is included. (Contains 17 references.) (LMI)

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Playing is the Thing: Three Activities for School Leaders

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Playing is the Thing: Three Activities for School Leaders

Early childhood educators and researchers tell us that play is a child's most appropriate avenue for learning (Bredekamp, 1986).

Piaget extolls the richness of learning that occurs when young children explore and interact with their environment. Mark Twain's definition "that which they are not obliged to do is play." In their own way and in their own time, they construct learning in their own "equilibration" (Piaget, 1980).

In Leslie Hart's Human Brain Human Learning (1983), he discusses the proster theory. According to this theory, when the brain perceives high stress and/or risk, it lowers its function to the limbic system and prepares all systems to flee or fight. This is a survival mode, therefore, the brain can not function in higher regions of the cerebrum where thinking, learning and creativity can function. Low stress play helps one think in higher regions.

Scholars in brain research speak of a "state of flow" which humans enter when they participate in an activity they find interesting and challenging but not overwhelming (Mannell, 1988). This activity Mihaly Csikszmenhalyi (1989), a psychologist, suggests is the optimal one for learning. New dendrites or brain connections are created when the brain is asked to focus in this low stress manner.

Perkins (1992) speaks of "hot cognitive economies." Students and teachers are so involved in learning that extra cost in time and effort makes

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sense to both. Engaging play seems to lower "cost" of learning while "hot" with involvement.

Critical thinking advocates Paul (1990) and Parks (1994) suggest bonding activities between members and active learning to stimulate thinking. Playing is more active and stimulating than most lectures.

Cooperative learning research suggests working in groups is effective in stimulating thinking an open dialogue from kindergarten through college. (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Play can encourage interaction between groups thus stimulating learning.

Adult learners need for tutors to step back and give them an environment of choice and autonomy in their learning (Knowles, 1978). Play can provide an environment of low risk decision making and freedom which adult learners need.

The student of how adults learn could find many other theorists and researchers who advocate one, some, or all of the components of playing as learning. The position herein is that when autonomous adults are faced with challenging tasks within a non-stressful, collegial environment, these adults may have optimal opportunity to learn. Perhaps even they will grow brain.

Therefore, the strategy of infusing games with concepts to be discussed in an academic setting is a rich one that needs to be considered by educators at

all levels. Here are three such games to stimulate thinking, active learning and collegial sharing for candidates for school leadership.

Planning Simulation Game

The first playing is a simulation of a planning process proscribed for schools in Kentucky which have not met state cognitive and non-cognitive goals. This plan is called a School Transformation Plan. It is an improvement plan for professional development, student achievement, communication with community and involvement of parents. Students are asked to study the data on the Sublimity School. Then, they plan in a group what they would do to improve this school (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993).

A team of students will be given 50 minutes to:

- Review the parent and staff surveys for your school (What areas are most problematic, prioritized?)
- Review the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (What areas are problematic, prioritized?)
- Check for "triangulation" of data to help identify "problems".
- Write one problem statement which can be supported by the survey and KIRIS data for your school. (The problem statement defines the component.)

- Brainstorm possible causes for the problem you described. (Write these down and prioritize them from "most probable" to "least probable".)
- Write a goal statement that, if reached, would solve the problem you identified.
- Develop 3-8 activities which, when completed, would insure that you reach your stated goal.

Note: Teams are free to reorganize so as to accomplish the task within the allotted time. As much as possible the teams are to work independently. Where information required for decision making is not available, they are to make reasonable assumptions.

Report: At the end of the 50 minutes, each team will share their problem statement, goal statement and sample activities with another team. They will also be asked to describe their organization and decision making process (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993).

The objective of this activity is to give students an opportunity to plan for school improvement. Adult learning proponents advocate learning that the adult perceives as having an application to one's life. This simulation for planning may be an actual task required of educators and parents involved with

improving schools in Kentucky.

Critical Thinking Question Cubes

The second playing field is a critical thinking game (Wiederhold, 1992). The basis of this game is the question matrix below.

1 What Is?	2 Where/ When Is?	3 Which Is?	4 Who Is?	5 Why Is?	6 How Is?
7 What Did?	8 Where/ When Did?	9 Which Did?	10 Who Did?	11 Why Did?	12 How Did?
13 What Can?	14 Where/ When Can?	15 Which Can?	16 Who Can?	17 Why Can?	18 How Can?
19 What Would?	20 Where/ When Would?	21 Which Would?	22 Who Would?	23 Why Would?	24 How Would?
25 What Will?	26 Where/ When Will?	27 Which Will?	28 Who Will?	29 Why Will?	30 How Will?
31 What Might?	32 Where/ When Might?	33 Which Might?	34 Who Might?	35 Why Might?	36 How Might?

The two cubes designed from this matrix will result in these 36 questions when rolled together. One cube's six sides will be "What", "When/Where", "Which", "Who", "Why" and "How". The other cube will have "Is", "Might", "Will", "Would", "Did" and "Can".

These questions can be used for most any topic. Many of the cubes' sides will result in lower order questions (Bloom, 1956) that ask for recall. Several of the sides stimulate higher order thinking such as ones that ask about possibility (What can?), probability (What would?), prediction (What will?) and imagination (What might?). These ask for analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creativity (Wiederhold, 1992).

These prompts can be applied to any topic. Perhaps a reading from The Principles of Scientific Management by Frederick Taylor (1910). If this is the topic, a roll of the dice might turn up what and might? Then, the student group would generate a question like, "What might happen when the worker's work rate improved three and one-half times and his pay improved three and one-half times?"

The next roll might generate "Who?" and "Would?" Then, the group might add this question to the pool. "Who would profit when the workers rate improves three and one-half times and his pay improves 60%?" and what would be the result?

This produces a pool of questions which may be discussed and then exchanged with another group. These questions then may stimulate discussions about scientific management that may not have occurred without these playful prompts.

A Leadership Perspective Multiple Intelligence Game (Williams, 1995)

The basis of this game is Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence. His theory is that all of us have at least seven intelligences to some degree. Our optimal learning occurs when one or a combination of these is used to stimulate our thoughts and actions (Gardner, 1991). Natural talents, when exercised, satisfy and stimulate learners toward further learning.

This game asks students to read difficult excerpts from organizational theory and practice and apply their different intelligences in understanding the meaning and implications of these concepts.

Linguistic Intelligence

The readings were from Mary Parker Follet, Frederick Taylor and W. Edwards Deming. The reading of these excerpts required students to use their linguistic intelligence. Then, they are asked to break into duos and triads to explore these leadership perspectives and their other intelligences in the following ways.

Bodily/Kinesthetic (Multiple Intelligence)

Human Relations

Experiment

Design a game where a team wins if they manage to stay together. For example, tie members' ankles together--three or four--and compete with another team with the same handicap to reach goal first.

Scientific Management

Design a game where a team wins if one part of team is carefully coached by another. For example, one member and another member coaches to help the "blind" member get to a goal.

Edwards Deming

Members in the room are playing tic-tac-toe, checkers or jacks.

Design a game that illustrates one of his 14 points. For example, on one team members are close to game make decisions together about appropriate moves. On another team one member is at a distance to game but must give a specific direction every five seconds so his partners can make a move.

A third team observes and records behavior for feedback to entire group.

Visual (Multiple Intelligence)

1. Draw and image.
2. Make a flow chart.

3. Construct a model.

4. Design a logo.

5. Sculpt a symbol.

6. Create a flag.

Use any of these forms to illustrate or symbolize concepts of human relations theorist, Follet; scientific management theorist, Taylor; and Edwards Deming's 14 points.

Musical (Multiple Intelligence)

Each Team

Make a list of songs that are reminiscent of concepts in Scientific Management, Human Relations, and Edwards Deming's 14 points. Then, hum this list for the other teams--if they don't recognize hum, than the performers can sing together a line. Sometimes students keep score.

Interpersonal Multiple Intelligence: An Active Listening Activity

Hawthorne Experiments Discussions for Active Learning	Scientific Management Discussions for Active Learning	Edwards Deming Discussions for Active Learning
Give an example of a time when your co-workers influenced you to change your work in some way. Listen to a partner, then share with the whole group your partner's example. Then partner agrees or adds to your interpretation.	Give an example when the clarification of a rule or expectation improved the work at hand. Listen to a partner, then share with the whole group your partner's example. Then partner agrees or adds to your interpretation.	Give an example of the one closest to the work making a decision about the work that resulted in an improvement. Listen to a partner, then share with the whole group your partner's example. Then, partner agrees or adds to your interpretation.

Intrapersonal (Multiple Intelligence) Journal Writing Activity

Hawthorne Experiments	Scientific Management	Edwards Deming
Reflections for Journal	Reflections for Journal	Reflections for Journal
How important is it to belong to the group?	How important is it to do the job quickly?	Am I willing to work cooperatively in a group?
How do I feel about extrinsic rewards versus intrinsic rewards?	Elaborate.	Elaborate.
Elaborate.	How important is it to have the job done to closely fit specifications.	Am I willing to let the people closest to the work make decisions about their work? Elaborate.
Do I worry about being more productive than my colleagues?	Elaborate.	Am I willing to give much personal commitment to my work?
Illustrate.	How important is it to supervise closely other's work?	Elaborate.
Do I worry about being less productive than my colleagues? Elaborate.	Elaborate.	

Logical Mathematical Multiple Intelligence: Data Gathering Activity

Using a Leikert scale or Parsons scale design a survey instrument using concepts from journal that would allow data gathering on these items from the intrapersonal reflections above.

Leikert Scale

Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Parsons Scale

Important_____ Not Important

5 4 3 2 1 0 5 4 3 2 1

The class that participates in these activities were exploring school and community relations and strategies for leaders to bring these two entities together.

These activities brought together the class as a learning community as they shared their successes and supported and respected each other's differences (an interpersonal intelligence).

As they practiced various ways of connecting knowledge and reflected on these differing paths, there was self-discovery (an intrapersonal intelligence).

For those who want recall of facts, how better to remember Mary Follet's human relations theory than a lovely voice singing "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony" This was one students demonstration of musical intelligence.

For those who want to remember aspects of a norming culture, there was the Culture Shock game. Participants shed one shoe, wore a bandanna over one eye and shared a communal napkin to understand the struggle to fit into a norming group (interpersonal intelligence).

Those who have struggled to translate concepts into a visual application such as a flag or logo are more likely to remember those concepts.

These kinds of activities in conventional halls of higher education are a risk for most of us who have mental models of lecture halls with straight rows and lecterns sequestering professors.

To create autonomous and creative leaders of dynamic schools, these risks are necessary for those with the responsibility of preparing leaders. But in the design and implementation of these games, the professor joins with the students to enter into a "state of flow" and produce more dendrites--growing new brain is necessary for all of us. To do this, "Playing is the Thing."

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